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CHAMPLAIN'S AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN 1613

The early explorers of America did a marvelous amount of work in their days of strenuous living, and of many we fortunately possess complete and vivid histories. Champlain is one of these, and as he himself wrote his own commentaries, we have a finely-drawn, clearly cut alto-relievo portrait of him in all but autobiographical form. The end of the civil and religious wars which died out in France, with the sixteenth century, set numerous Frenchmen a-roving, and among the soldiers who had to change their manner of life was Quarter-master Samuel Champlain, who had been on the side of the king and the pope in the Brittany struggles. There was sea-water in his breed; his ancestors were fisher-folk, and his uncle a sea-captain, who was engaged to take the last of the Spanish troops out of France homeward, and Champlain, not wishing to be idle, accepted an invitation to go along. So we find him making maps of the head-lands and harbors they passed, both on the way to Cadiz and on a voyage he forthwith undertook to the Spanish Main and to Mexico, where he sketched the New World animals, trees, fruits, and aborigines, and, with his drawings, sent to the King of France a detailed account of his interesting travels. This was a little after the time when Shakespeare wrote the *Tempest*, but the description he gives of the Bermuda waters shows what the mariners in the small ships of those days thought of the weather there, and such a description as his might have inspired the poet. "Bermuda," he says, "is a mountainous island, the approach to which is dreadful on account of the surrounding dangers, for it is almost always raining there, and it thunders so often that it seems as if heaven and earth would meet. The ambient ocean is tempestuous in the extreme, and the waves run mountains high." Does not this conjure up for us Prospero and Ariel, and the "still vex'd Bermuethes?"

As this is not meant to be a life of Champlain, it is in order merely to say that Henry IV. gave him a pension, and that with other people he became associated in voyages to Canada, which Jacques Cartier had visited long years before. But Champlain had not only Cartier's dash, but a tenacity of purpose and a thoroughness in his way of doing things which were all his own. And in his several voyages he completely explored the coasts of New England, Nova Scotia, and Gaspé, helped to settle Port Royal (now Annapolis), actually founded Quebec and

Montreal, went up the Ottawa to the Lake of the Hurons or Fresh Water Sea, and ascended the Richelieu, to discover Lakes Champlain and George. He brought out clergy and established the Roman Catholic Church. He had, indeed, to surrender Quebec to the Kirks, and was carried, with others, away to England, but even there, during his five weeks' stay near the French Ambassador, I think it was he who laid the basis for the restitution of Canada to the French, which shortly followed—Charles II. giving it up so as to secure Queen Henrietta's overdue dowry—and he then went back with fuller power than ever, saw his infant colony well re-established, and died and was buried in the little city he loved so well.*

In quite early times, say in 1613, he had attempted even more; he commenced an enterprise not yet completed, though it may soon be accomplished, viz.: the establishing of a trade route between the Northern Ocean and the valley of the St. Lawrence. And of his attempt to reach the Hudson Bay by a land and river route, this paper is intended to give particulars.

His own writings must be the basis of the account, and as in this particular work he is especially lucid, there should be little difficulty in reconstructing the scene.

He commences with a picture of the way merchants over-reached themselves, and in his downright, old way he was no free-trader, but a monopolist. "They send their vessels into the ice," says he, "in the hope to be the first in the river; they secretly (as they think) bid against each other for furs and so give far more for them than necessary—thinking to forestall their competitors and getting cheated themselves." This he complained of because they were gathering the fruits of his labors, without contributing to the great costs and charges of building forts and warehouses at Quebec and elsewhere, and aiding him to make fresh discoveries for the glory and profit of France, or helping to bring the poor Indians to the knowledge of the Lord!

To remedy all this he succeeded in getting some sort of a patent of

* The *Relations* of the Jesuits are full of references to Champlain. In 1640, speaking of a Huron settlement, they say: "This was where the late M. de Champlain remained longest during his voyage to the inland sea, two and twenty years ago, and here his reputation is still a living memory in the minds of the wild races, who honor, after these many years, the numerous virtues they found him to possess, especially his chastity and continence. Would to God other early French travelers had been like him."

One dark spot appears to rest upon his noble, solid, unselfish character. He was the first to fire a shot in war in Canada. Raiding with Algonquin and Huron tribes, he sullied with Iroquois blood the shores of the lake to which by right of discovery he gave his name.

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monopoly, and on the 5th of March, 1613, he and the *Sieur l'Ange* set sail off from France to make discoveries and to go a-fighting together if opportunity should occur.

A rapid passage enabled them to reach the Lachine Rapids on the 21st of May, and after explaining why he had not come out the year before as promised, he bought a couple of canoes, hired one Indian guide; and now begins the story proper.

Having only two canoes, he could take but four men, one of whom was *Nicolas de Vignau*, "the most impudent liar that had been heard of for a long time," who had lived with the Indians, knew their speech, and had been sent in previous years to spy out the country. This *Vignau* had returned to Paris in 1612, and told Champlain that he had seen the Northern Sea—that the Ottawa rose in a lake which had another outlet that way—and that in seventeen days you could go and return from Lachine to the Arctic Ocean. Not satisfied with this one enormous lie, he further said he had seen the wreckage of an English vessel which had been cast away there, from which eighty men had landed; that the Indians had killed them because they wished to take by force their maize and other provisions; that he had seen the heads of these English whom the Indians had scalped (as was their custom), and that they wished to show Champlain the scalps and to give him an English boy they had kept alive for the purpose.

Champlain seems to have had some doubts about the matter, for he says that though he was pleased at the prospect of finding so near what he had believed to be so far, he begged the man to tell the truth, for he was putting a rope round his neck if he was lying, though if he was telling the truth he might be sure of being well recompensed. But the fellow swore to it all and gave a written account of the country he had been through, so Champlain's doubts were dissipated, and he took the man to see *Marshal de Brissac*, *President Jeannin*, and other followers of the court; the rather because he understood that in 1610 and 11 the English under *Hudson* had passed through the straits in latitude 63°, and had wintered in 53°, and lost some vessels. So the dignitaries said he ought to go in person and see about it.

In going up the Ottawa nothing very remarkable happened for some days, but when they were fairly among the rapids of the Long Sapelt, "it was there," says our friend, "we had trouble. For we could not portage our craft because the woods were so dense, and the rapidity of the current so great; it makes a terrible noise and so much foam that you can't see the water, and it is so full of rocks and islets that we had to tow our craft, and I nearly lost my life as I was hauling mine along; it ran

cross-ways in a whirlpool, and if I had not been so lucky as to fall between two rocks it would have dragged me in, because I had not time to undo the line which was twisted round my hand and cut me badly so that I thought my hand was off. So I cried aloud to the Lord and began hauling in the canoe, which the eddy brought home, so I escaped and praised God and prayed for continued preservation." Of course, as he remarks, if the canoe had been lost, it would have been a poor lookout indeed! The rest of the party had similar troubles and similar escapes.

The account of the journey up the Ottawa—past the Gatineau and the Rideau, to Chaudière Falls—is so faithfully described that one can recognize every feature to this day, but all through they had a difficult journey, during which he remarked that DeVignau did not know much about the route, and was always saying there was no danger in the rapids, they must get over them.

The Indians, on the other hand said to De Vignau, "Are you tired of life?" and to Champlain, "You must not believe him," and they portaged as much as they could, though that was troublesome; and any one who has done any hard work of the kind can see Champlain sweating along, though he had "only three guns to carry and three paddles, and a great coat, and a few other trifles." Still he encouraged his folks, "who were even more heavily laden, and were more done up by the mosquitoes than by their burdens."

When they reached the Muskrat Lake, a little off the line of the Ottawa, but on the portage route, they found a chief named Nibachis, who wondered how ever they could have got up, and he gave them escort of four canoes to go and visit Tessoüat, a chief whom Champlain had met and made a friend of long before, whose people were the powerful and clever folks of Allumette Island—the island, as it was often called. On the way they admired the cemeteries of this people, in which the graves were marked by posts carved to resemble rudely the figure of the buried person. If it was a warrior, they represented it by a shield, a club, a bow and arrows hung on the post; if a chief, by a crest on his head and a string of beads or other ornaments; if a child, a bow and arrows; if a woman, a kettle, an earthen pot, a wooden spoon or a paddle. The body was enwrapped in the beaver skin robe or other furs, which the owner had in his life time, and they put all his accessories near it, such as axes, knives, kettles, and hooks, so as to be of use to him in the country he was going to, "for these people believed in the immortality of the soul."*

* It was on this voyage, shortly before reaching Nibachis' quarters, that Champlain lost his astrolabe. In 1867, on the old portage road to Muskrat Lake, Captain Overman's people found

Tessouiat was as much pleased as surprised to see Champlain, and at once issued invitations for a smoke. So the next day they all had a repast in Tessouiat's large dwelling—each guest bringing his own wooden plate and spoon—the viands being maize, crushed and boiled into a soup, with fish and meat cut into small pieces, no salt; also meat and fish cooked separately, which Tessouiat distributed, himself eating nothing. Thirst was slaked by beautiful spring water. The feast over, all the young men left, to stay outside the door, while the rest filled their pipes, each in turn of

three drinking cups of silver, which fitted into each other; also a curious mathematical instrument of plate brass. This was given to Mr. R. S. Cassels, then of Ottawa, now of Toronto, who, recognizing its great value, sought out the silver cups, but unfortunately a day too late, for the peddler, who had bought them for a song, had found no one to sell them to, and had just melted them down, and showed Mr. Cassels the lump of silver; perhaps a dollar's worth. Seeing Mr. Cassels' gun with a crest engraved upon it, he said there was a "picture" on them just like that. If we only had these cups with the crest we should know positively whose they had been, but as we have not, we have to be content with Mr. A. T. Russell's inductive proof that the astrolabe and the cups were Champlain's. Champlain's books are full of observations of latitude. Now when he went by Muskrat Lake to avoid the furious rapids of the main river, he left the Ottawa at a place now called Gould's Landing, where he says, "*Ce lieu estoit par 46 2-3 de latitude.*" This is an error of a full degree, in addition to the usual error of the instrument, and is the last place where he says he took an observation. He says of the fort on Allumette Island, where he met Tessouiat, that "*elle est par 47 degres de latitude,*" carrying forward the error of a degree. Had he his instrument still, the chances are, thousands to one, he would have detected the error in the previous observations, and Mr. Russell thinks this conclusive proof that he took no observation at Tessouiat's place at all, though he had time, opportunity, and every inducement so to do.

As far as we here know there are but three astrolabes now existing in the world. These instruments consist of a graduated circle, in the center of which is a pivot, on which works a bar. Near the end of this bar are ridges of metal, with a nick in each, and when the instrument is suspended freely, with the bar pointing to the sun at noon so truly that the ray which passes through one nick also passes through the other, you have the latitude to within a little. The error of Champlain's astrolabe would not exceed one-third of a degree. The astrolabe was in use among the Arabians. It was no doubt used by the Phoenicians and the Akkad Chaldeans, for the late W. Smith, of the British Museum (and Assyrian fame) discovered a part of an astrolabe in the palace of Sennacherib about ten years ago. "It was seemingly," Mr. Russell says, "an instrument of superior character to Champlain's; its circumference was divided into twelve parts corresponding with the signs of the zodiac, the degrees in each marked with an inner circle, naming prominent stars." In the British Museum is also one other astrolabe, obtained from the wreck on the Irish coast of one of the ships of the Spanish Armada. Astrolabes were then new to Europe. One of the last works on them (I again quote Mr. Russell) is Clavin's *Treatise on Astrolabes*, Mayence, 1611. In 1631, Vernier published a pamphlet on the construction and use of the *New Quadrant of Mathematics*. In this is explained the nature and use of the Vernier scale (for reading subdivisions of degrees), and the new quadrant, with its vernier, soon thrust the astrolabe out of use. Meantime, during its short European career—short that is, compared to its long history among Tyrians, Carthaginians, Ethiopians, and others—it had been used by Vasco de Gama in discovering the way round the Cape of Good Hope, by Columbus in re-discovering the direct route to America, and a host of other great navigators and travelers, whose names will not die while our civilization lasts.

fering Champlain a whiff. They employed half an hour or more in this exercise, without saying a word. At last—

Champlain. I have come to testify my regard; my desire to assist you in your wars as I did before. I could not come last year because my King required me in other wars, but now I have a number of men at Montreal, and I have come to see the fertility of the country; also the lakes, rivers, and the ocean. And I want to see the nation which is six days' journey from this place; I mean the Nipissings, to invite them to war also, and I wish for four canoes and eight men of yours to take me there.

Tessouat (after more smoking and whispered counsel among the Indians). We admit that you are better disposed toward us than any other Frenchman we have known. You have shown this in the past, and now again, by coming so far and through such great dangers to see us. We therefore regard you as one of us; but you did break your word last year, when two thousand Indians went to the Sault (Lachine) to meet you, with presents for you, and not finding you there, thought you were dead, and mourned. Moreover, the French who were there did not treat us well and refused to go with us on our foray, and we resolved not to go there again. This year, therefore, our folks went raiding on their own account. Twelve hundred have gone; so let us put off a joint expedition until next year.

As for the four canoes, you shall have them, but we do not favor your enterprise; you may have great hardships to meet; those people are sorcerers and have killed many of our folks by witchcraft and poison; as for war, it is useless to ask them; they are people of little courage.

Champlain (who only wanted to see and make friends with these people so as to get up to the Arctic Ocean). The portages and rapids cannot be worse than those I have passed. Their sorceries are powerless against me, for my God will preserve me. As for their herbs, I know them and shall not eat them.

As he was strolling through their gardens trying to kill time, observing their pumpkins, beans, and the new European peas they were beginning to grow, the interpreter, Thomas, told him that after he had left, the Indians had resolved not to furnish the canoes; that none would go with him, that they wished him to defer the journey until the year following, when they would give him a good convoy; for they had dreamed that if he were to go at once, he and his friends would die. So the following colloquy occurred:

Champlain. I have hitherto thought you truthful and honorable men, but now you show yourselves children and liars, and if you do not carry

out your promises, you will not be showing me good will; nevertheless, if it be inconvenient to give me four canoes, let me have two, with four of yourselves.

The Council. We refuse you because of the difficulty and number of the rapids, the ill-will of the tribes, and our fear that you will be lost.

Champlain. I would never have believed you could have showed me so little friendship. Why, I have a lad here (pointing to De Vignau) who has been to the country, and he saw none of the difficulties you speak about, nor did he find the people so ill-disposed.

Tessouât (after a long pause). Is it true, Nicolas, that you say you have been to the country of the Nipissings?

De Vignau (after a long silence). Yes; I have been there.

Tessouât (during a tumult in which they all threw themselves upon the man, as if they would cut him and tear him to pieces). You are a shameless liar, Nicolas! You know that you lay down beside me every night; you rose from beside me every morning. If you were among them, it must have been during sleep. How can you be so impudent as to tell your master lies, and so evil-minded as to wish him to risk his life among so many portages? You are a lost man; he ought to kill you more cruelly than we kill our enemies. I don't wonder now that he was so importunate, trusting your word as he did.

Champlain (to De Vignau). You must answer these folks; you must describe the country to them, so that I may believe you.

As De Vignau made no reply, Champlain took him aside, begged him to tell the truth, and promised that if he had seen the sea he would give him the stipulated reward; but if not, to say so and end all further trouble. To which with oaths he replied, affirming all he had said before, "which he would prove if they would only lend him canoes;" and the Indians resolved to send a canoe secretly to the Nipissings to inform them of Champlain's arrival, of which the interpreter told his chief. So in further council—

Champlain. I have dreamed that you are sending a canoe to the Nipissings, without telling me, which surprises me, because you know how much I wish to go myself.

The Chiefs. You offend us much because you trust a liar who wishes you to lose your life, more than so many brave chiefs who are your friends, and value it.

Champlain. Why, the man has been in the country, with a relative of Tessouât's, and has seen the ocean, and the wreck of an English vessel, and eighty heads the tribes there have, and a young English boy, a prisoner, whom they wish to give me!

The Chiefs. The sea? The ships? The heads of the English? The horrible liar! We will call him Liar from henceforth. Kill him, or make him say who was with him, what lakes and rivers he went by!

De Vignau (with effrontery). I forget the name of the Indian.

Champlain. He has told me the name twenty times, once no later than yesterday, and here is the map he gave me in which the particulars of the route are given. Thomas, translate this for the Indians.

The Indians cross-questioned the man about the map, etc., but he did not reply, "showing his wickedness by his silence." So Champlain retired for quiet thought. He reflected on the accounts given of Hudson's voyage, with which the account of this liar seemed to agree pretty fairly. That it was unlikely such a lad could have imagined the whole thing; that it was almost incredible he would have undertaken this journey had he not seen what he recounted; that it was perhaps ignorance which prevented him from replying to the Indians; that if the English account were true, the Northern Ocean could not be more than three hundred miles away, since we were in lat. 47 and long. 280 from Ferrol (not quite exact); that the difficulty of passing the rapids and the steepness of the mountains, full of snow, might be the reason these people knew nothing of the ocean; that they had always said, and repeated this every year, that it was but thirty-five or forty days' journey from the Hurons' country to the ocean, which they could visit by three routes, but that none had seen it except this liar, whose saying the road was so short had caused him much to rejoice.

Meanwhile they were getting ready the canoe and time was pressing, so Champlain called his man again.

Champlain. The time for dissimulation has passed. I am going to take the opportunity which is given me. Tell me truly, then, if you have seen what you report or not. I will forgive all the past and forget it, if you speak truly now. But if I go on and find it false, I will have you hanged, sure, without mercy, when I return.

De Vignau (throwing himself upon his knees). Pardon, pardon, then! All I said, whether in France or here, is false. I never saw the sea. I was never up beyond this village of Tessoüat's. I only told these lies so as to get back to Canada.

Champlain (beside himself with anger). I can't bear the sight of you. Get away! Thomas, finish questioning the man, and report to me.

Thomas (after a time). I think you should not go farther. The man thought you would be deterred by the difficulties, postpone the journey, and that he would none the less have his reward. He wishes to be left here, and will go and find the sea or die in the attempt.

All which was very unsatisfactory to Champlain, who had to tell the Indians (no pleasant task) that he had been deceived, and to endure their reproaches for the little faith he had placed in them. Don't you see, they said, he wanted you to be killed? Give him to us and he will tell no more lies, we promise you; and they all set at him—children, too—calling him "Liar," "Liar!" Most of all though, the loss of the year was regretted, and all its trials and dangers, and the extinction of hope to reach the sea that way. So on the 10th of June Champlain said adieu to Tessoüat, "that good old chief," with presents and promises to come again next season and help him with his wars.

In his account of the return trip down the Ottawa, Champlain pauses (and we will pause a little with him), to give an account of the Indian superstitions clinging to the Chaudière Falls. In his succinct way he says that when the canoes had been portaged to the calm water below, one of the Indians handed round a wooden plate, each putting some tobacco in it for an offertory; which done, it was placed in the middle of the clustering band, who all danced around it, chanting after their own wild fashion. One of the chiefs then made a speech, declaring that thus they had done from of old, to be preserved from their enemies; after which he hurled the plate into the seething cauldron; they shouted all together, and went on their way with confidence. It was but a few hundred yards below that spot that the writer, with a number of friends, a great many years ago, on a fine summer afternoon, met to examine an Indian cemetery.

The ground was a pure sand, and there were, even then, dozens of tumuli marking the graves. We dug into one, and three feet below the surface, under a couple of flat stones, was the skeleton of the ancient brave. The body seemed to have been laid on its side, the knees drawn up to the breast, but it may have been buried sitting in a crouching posture. We found no relics, neither pipe nor arrow-head; the doctor of the party carried off the skull, and on my return I was asked by my wife what right I had to disturb the poor man's bones? I have never exhumed an Indian since, but have felt that the same respect is due to their remains as to those of people of a lighter skin. The spot where that cemetery was is now covered with huge saw mills and millions of feet of lumber, and the *ossæ* of the old Indians have been shoveled into their great river, whose falls now light the capital of Canada with a thousand electric lamps, but memory recalls the lovely spot, as it was when the pine shrubs around it exhaled their spicy perfume in the warm summer weather, and the deep, black river rushed in front, its current flecked with the white foam-dribblets from the roaring cauldron of the falls above. And imagination carries me, as easily, two or

three centuries farther into the past, when the Red Men of the Woods were undisputed lords of the forest, field, and stream, when their various nations warred as boldly as your Servians and Bulgarians of to-day, and when, with faith as confident as that of Papist or Puritan, they offered to the Spirit of the Cataract and Rapid, with measured dance and cadenced song, their time-honored sacrifices.

Dark, sullen, morose, are the legends of the Indians. "Hush," said they to the Jesuit Father Albanel, when he was being paddled around a mountain cape in Mistassini Lake; "whisper low, for the spirit of the point will be angered, invoke his thunders, call up the storm-wind and the blinding glare of lightning, and we are all lost men!" "Have a care," said they, to Menard and his successors, on Lake Superior, "cast no refuse into the clear, calm lake, or the very fish, which are instinct with the spirits of the departed, will avoid your lines and you will starve! And the island you see there, Michipicaten, is alive—it moves, it seems now close, now far away, and now it disappears—nor dare one of us ever land on its enchanted shores." Yet was there some sweet poetry in their beliefs, and Friar Sagard tells of the boulder rock, hard by the Indian village of the Hurons on the well-beaten narrow track between it and the tribal cemetery, which stone the populace dared scarcely pass at night, or, if they did, they *heard* the spirits of departed lovers, sweeping past it on the trail, with a rushing sough, to hover round the dwelling of the ones from whom they had been parted by the *fiat*, which among Indians and white alike, is swift and fell.

Without any stirring adventures, the party reached Montreal in safety, and thence, by Tadousac, Champlain returned to France.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Arthur Harvey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

ROSE PARK, TORONTO, January 6, 1886.